

An AFBF'ers Guide to the Galaxy. . . Of County Fairs
By Bailey Corwine

DC State Fair	Sept. 8	Gateway DC	Food contests
Allegany County Fair	July 13-20	Allegany Co. Fairgrounds	Fireworks, concerts
Charles County Fair	Sept. 12-15	Charles Co. Fairgrounds	Pig races, carnival, lawnmower racing
Great Frederick Fair	Sept. 13-21	Frederick Fairgrounds	Ag exhibits, landscaping competitions
Howard County Fair	Aug. 3-10	Howard Co. Fairgrounds	Horse and pony shows, magic shows, concerts
Montgomery Co. Agricultural Fair	Aug. 9-17	Montgomery Co. Agricultural Fairgrounds	Carnival rides, fried food, ag exhibits
Prince George's County Fair	Sept. 5-8	Show Place Arena	Carnival rides, best jam contest
Washington County Fair	July 13-20	Washington County Agricultural Education Center	Carnival, bull riding, truck pull, live music
Arlington County Fair	Aug. 14-18	Thomas Jefferson Community Center	Arts and crafts vendors, fried food
Fairfax Co. 4H Fair and Carnival	Aug. 2-5	Frying Pan Farm Park	Carnival Rides, tractor pulls, live music
Loudoun County Fair	July 23-28	Loudoun County Fairgrounds	Goat yoga, watermelon eating contest, hypnotist
Prince William County Fair	Aug. 9-17	Prince William County Fairgrounds	All-day wine tastings, three-ring circus

All about FFA and 4-H

Most county fairs center around the exhibition of projects completed through 4-H or FFA, two of the most prominent youth development organizations in the U.S. and around the world.

The National FFA Organization, formerly known as Future Farmers of America, was founded in 1928 and strives to promote premier leadership, personal growth and career success amongst its members. Today, there are nearly 670,000 FFA members from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Members can participate in a diverse selection of Supervised Agricultural Experiences such as Beef Production, Horticulture or Natural Resources Management.

4-H was started in 1902 in Clark County, Ohio and is delivered by the Cooperative Extension Services. There are 4-H clubs in all 50 states and even a global program. 4-H focuses on

“inspiring kids to do” in many program areas, including STEM, agriculture, healthy living and citizenship. Youth can participate in 4-H through in-school and extracurricular programming, centralized through local 4-H clubs.

Members of both 4-H and FFA are often incredibly knowledgeable about their projects and can be a great resource for someone looking to know more about agriculture. If you see a 4-H or FFA member at a county fair, take a moment to ask them about their projects! The future of agriculture is bright because of programs like these, and their members would love to chat with you about what agriculture means to them.

On a Budget? The County Fair is For You!

County fairs are often a great place to take the family, especially if you are on a budget! Many fairs offer free entertainment programs, including concerts, truck and tractor pulls, demolition derbies, magic shows and cooking or crafting demonstrations. Additionally, county fairs often run specials on carnival entry, including wristband promotions, all-day passes, or combined fair entry and carnival tickets.

You can also take in a wealth of educational opportunities at county fairs across the country (and state fairs, too!) such as birthing centers, agri-science fairs, and STEM education displays. You could entertain your family all weekend with little to no financial investment required.

For more information on how to be a frugal fairgoer, check out [this](#) great resource from the Montgomery County Fair!

Two Words: Fair Food

Plan to bring your appetite to the county fair, but leave any health goals behind! While fair food may not be the most nutritious sustenance category, it definitely offers plenty of opportunity for trying some whacky, inventive, or just plain delicious creations.

Staples like cotton candy, funnel cakes and corn dogs can be found in the food courts of many county fairs, while some vendors opt for more adventurous options. Look for fried Oreos, cheesecake on a stick, or chocolate-covered bacon. And of course, if you're in the DMV, many vendors offer crab cakes, clam strips, or cheesesteaks.

Of course, if you're watching your waistline (or wallet!) many fairs allow you to bring in your own food and drink. Pack some sandwiches and fresh fruit and make it a picnic!

So You Want To Watch a Livestock Show. . .

Livestock shows are often the central attraction at county fairs. But what even happens in a livestock show? While each species of livestock is judged on different criteria, most livestock shows follow a general format. Let's break it down:

First, exhibitors (generally 4-H or FFA members, but sometimes farmers, ranchers, and other community members) work for several months to get their project in tip-top shape. This could mean exercising their animal(s) daily, crafting the perfect diet so that their project maximizes performance, or meticulously grooming the animal so that they'll look their best on show day.

Once fair time arrives, exhibitors enter their projects into the show. Entries are based on the animal's species, breed, age, weight or purpose—breeding or consumption. Then, once all entries have been collected, fair managers divide the animals into groups, called classes, to help keep the show organized. Class breakdowns are typically posted around the fairgrounds so that exhibitors and spectators can plan to be ready.

During the show, exhibitors work hard to present their animal's best qualities. For beef cattle, the ideal qualities include heavy muscle and a good structural build, while chicken exhibitors are more focused on the health and appearance of the bird. Trained professionals are hired as judges, and they select the highest quality animals based on an industry standard.

At the conclusion of the show, the judge or judges will select winners. There may be several rounds exhibitors have to win in order to be considered for the championship, depending on the size of the show and the number of animals entered. Champion animals are typically awarded ribbons, plaques, trophies or other prestigious awards, and may also earn their exhibitor a cash prize.

Livestock shows provide an excellent opportunity for young people to learn about stewardship, whether they are selected as the grand champion or not. Shows also provide an opportunity for the general public to get an inside look at how the food on their plate is raised.